



How Would You Answer This Criticism of Christianity? *Does Salvation Make Sense?*

I have over the past few years had a number of Muslims message me directly criticizing the Christian message of salvation. The argument is almost always the same. If salvation is offered freely to everyone without having to do anything to earn it, what is to keep those who become Christian that way from living wild, immoral lives afterward since they have their “free pass to paradise”? Rather than just wave off the concern as a silly argument, it seems best to take it seriously and see what we have in Scripture. Is God just giving us permission to sin by forgiving our sins unconditionally? What do you think? If you are Christian, have you found this to be the case?

Let us start with the foundation of grace. As we have examined this before in a previous message, we won't go in depth on the interpretation of 1 John 2: 1-2. **My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one. He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.** (1 John 1: 1-2 CSB) Clearly it is not God's intention that those who have received salvation will sin anymore. The purpose of salvation is to stop sinning dead in its tracks. Regardless of your religion, you cannot take this any other way. The obliteration of sin and sinning is the central work of salvation and the death of Christ on the Cross. Verse one makes that obvious. **I am writing these things so that you may not sin.** There is no ambiguity in this. God's plan for every person who receives salvation is the end of sinning. You may argue that God's plan does not work. You could point out Christians, famous or otherwise who have loudly proclaimed their faith in Jesus as their Savior and then committed monstrous sins. A world renowned pastor who had a significant influence on my thinking of how to organize a church service was discovered to be an adulterer who tried to seduce numerous women in the church where he was pastor. Does that mean God's plan has collapsed? Is Grace a failure and salvation a lost cause? We certainly disagree with that premise.

The Bible is not some flimsy manual promoting fantasies. It does not sweep under the rug the sinning of its most famous heroes. And you of course can say of yourself that as John admits will likely happen with each of us, you still sin even after salvation has been worked in you. Christianity is not alone in this. Each religion has its fair share of horrifying sinners who claim to be avid practitioners of their faith and yet commit terrible sins, many times in the name of the god they serve. And don't try to leave out atheists and agnostics either. Sin is universal and sinning is no respecter of religion or anti-religion. This is where Christianity faces the critical issue head-on. If you sin, Christ has died to take that sin away from you and free you of both its guilt as well as its power over you. Let's turn to the bigger issue. If God offers you grace in salvation, what is to motivate you to fall for temptations and live a full-blown life of sin?

To illustrate the miracle of Christianity and the grace of God, take a look at the most infamous period in King David's life. He was wealthier than he ever imagined. He not only had multiple wives, he also had a number of concubines. Yet they were not enough. David's lust demanded that the wife of one of the most courageous soldiers serving in his army be his too. After David spotted Bathsheba bathing on a roof below him, he sent for her, knowing from his servant she was married, ignored the commandment of God and slept with her. When David found out he had gotten Bathsheba pregnant, David arranged with the general overseeing his army to make sure Uriah, Bathsheba's husband die in battle. Not one but two horrific sins the great man of God committed. The LORD did something that followers of Mohamed would consider unthinkable. The LORD forgave David. **Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan replied, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.** (2 Samuel 12: 13 NIV)

Take special note of the exact wording. The Lord forgave David's sin. It does not say sins. It was not just one sin of David but multiple. David not only committed adultery with Bathsheba, but he also had her husband murdered. Then there is also the lust that burned within him before he actually slept with Bathsheba as well as how he pushed his servants to violate their own consciences by having them bring Bathsheba to him when they all knew how wrong it was. There were many, many sins David committed in this whole set of acts. Sin and sins are different. Sin is the global determination one makes to rebel against God. It is the decision to do as I please, it is Spiritual anarchy. I am in charge. I will do what I want. It is me and my wishes and God is not the Lord in it. Sins are the individual acts either you commit physically or mentally that violate the Word of God. It encompasses lust as well as theft, unforgiveness as well as murder. Sins are all those specific ways you turn away from God and do as you please. Sin is the way of life that rejects God as Lord. It was David's rejection of God that led to his many terrible sins. That was what God addressed.

Perhaps you are not familiar with the biography of David. As mentioned before, one wife was not enough for him. He had to have many women to quench his lust and even then they were not enough to satisfy David. He had to have Uriah's wife too. After all the sinning was done and the crimes he committed were over, David admitted that he had sinned against God. All the sins were there, the terrible things he did but it was the sin he confessed. "I did it my way God. I rejected you as Lord." The Sin was what wrecked him and would continue to destroy both him and the people he influenced around him, his other wives, children, fellow countrymen. If the sin was not addressed, the sins would just keep ruining him and others. God though did not do what many in religion think he should have done. Rather than matching an eye for an eye and destroying David's life, the Lord forgave His sin. Keep in mind, the question is, "If God acts in grace and forgives us, what is to keep us from just sinning on and on, taking advantage of God's mercy?" Here is my response. Look at what forgiveness did in David. From this point forward, there is no record of David ever again committing sexual sin. He did not marry another wife. He seems to have completely come to his senses and followed God as Lord in this area of great rebellion. Even at the end of David's life something fascinating occurred that reveals just how well forgiveness worked in him. When David was old, he was always cold, so the king's servants thought the solution was to find a beautiful young virgin to sleep with him and keep him warm at night. Yet, this is how David responded. **The girl was of unsurpassed beauty, and she became the king's caregiver. She attended to him, but he was not intimate with her.** (1 Kings 1: 4 CSB)

Did you notice what happened with David? He never had sexual relations with her. And why would that be? He was too old? The servants didn't seem to think so. Forgiveness completely transformed him so that his biggest weakness became it seems his greatest strength. Before you are born again and you have the Spirit of God living in you, Satan has free access to your heart. It is just you protecting yourself against his temptations. But when salvation comes and God forgives your sin, you now have God Himself fighting for you, influencing your thinking, your priorities, your values. There are three new characteristics of the born again Christian that alter their reaction to temptation. 1. With the Holy Spirit within you, you now have the power of God to victoriously live a holy life. You can turn your back on sin. 2. There is in you the force of God's personality repulsed by sin. He hates sin. That impacts how you see it. 3. The Love of God is within you. Just as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit love each other perfectly, so you have that same love for God percolating in you. Why would you rebel against God if you have supernatural love for God within? Do you see how crazy it is to wonder what would keep believers from sinning if Christ just forgives them? Here is the difference between Christians and those who choose a god like Allah who makes fear the reason for holiness. Is love not more powerful than fear and loyalty built on love stronger than adherence to laws due to dread of what may arise if you step out of line? The rule of the universe built on the foundation of the grace and mercy of God is this. **Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.**' (Mark 12: 30 NIV) Why would a forgiven Christian live a holy life? It is because he or she loves God too much to sin against the Savior.